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Ariz. governor signs immigration bill into law

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PHOENIX -- Thousands of protesters gathered outside the state capitol and hundreds more at a state office building in Tucson April 23 awaiting Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer's announcement that she had signed into law an immigration bill that has been harshly criticized by civil rights groups, religious leaders and even President Barack Obama, who called it "misguided."

The law will require police to ask people they encounter in routine activities for proof of their immigration status and makes it a crime to be in the state illegally. Federal law treats presence in the country without permission to be a violation of civil law and does not require people to carry proof of their immigration status.

Brewer had been bombarded with mail, phone calls and e-mail messages since the Legislature sent her the bill April 19. Throughout the week protesters gathered at the capitol each day, including hundreds of high school students who walked off their campuses to join the protest. Students left their high schools in Tucson to do the same at a downtown state government building April 23.

Among those pressing Brewer to veto the bill were the state's three Catholic bishops and Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, who called the legislation "the country's most retrogressive, mean-spirited and useless anti-immigrant law," in his blog.

At a press conference announcing she was signing the bill, Brewer said it would make Arizona safer.

In his remarks at a naturalization ceremony at the White House earlier that day, Obama said failure to enact immigration reforms at the federal level opened the door to "irresponsibility by others ... which threatened to undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans, as well as the trust between police and their communities that is so crucial to keeping us safe."

Obama said he'd instructed the administration to study the civil rights and other implications of the legislation. Several prominent organizations, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union, have threatened lawsuits to stop it from being implemented.

The turbulent atmosphere in Arizona around the legislation led Rep. Raul Grijalva to close his district offices early April 23, after threats of violence were received by the Tucson Democrat's staff. Grijalva opposes the legislation and has encouraged an economic boycott of the state as a protest.

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